

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 238 580

PS 014 078

AUTHOR Ziegler, Mark E.  
TITLE The Time Parents and Children Spend Together.  
PUB DATE Aug 83  
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (91st, Anaheim, CA, August 26-30, 1983).  
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS \*Cognitive Ability; Elementary Education; \*Elementary School Students; Elementary School Teachers; \*Fathers; Grade 3; Grade 4; \*Mothers; Parent Participation; Parent Student Relationship; Rating Scales; \*Social Development; Time

## ABSTRACT

Questions about how parents' childrearing time becomes associated with different developmental outcomes and about the relative importance of the quantity and quality of shared parent/child time remain largely unanswered. A study explored such associations in a sample of 48 white middle class third and fourth graders (24 boys and 24 girls) and their mothers and fathers. Each child received a battery of five cognitive and achievement tasks. Teachers were asked to rate the children on their classroom behaviors, including learning effectiveness, memory, attentiveness, and cooperativeness. Both parents were interviewed, asked to keep diaries of time spent with their child, and requested to record their child's activities. Parents specifically indicated indirect, direct, or available time with their children. Results indicated large interfamily variability but no differences in the time parents and children spent together with respect to the sex of the child. In addition, it was found that mothers' available time for contact with the child exceeded the available time of fathers. Finally, while a positive relationship was found to exist between the amount of time fathers spent supervising their children and teacher ratings of the children's cognitive abilities, the inverse was true for mothers' time. These and other results suggested the relationship between parents' time and children's development was not straightforward, nor was it the same for mothers and fathers in this sample.

(Author/BJD)

\*\*\*\*\*  
\* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made \*  
\* from the original document. \*  
\*\*\*\*\*

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION  
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION  
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as  
received from the person or organization  
originating it.  
Minor changes have been made to improve  
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-  
ment do not necessarily represent official NIE  
position or policy.

ED238580

The Time Parents and Children Spend Together

6.4.4

Mark E. Ziegler

Institute for Social Research

University of Michigan

Ann Arbor, MI 48109

Mailing address:

Chelsea Community Hospital

775 S. Main St.

Chelsea, MI 48118

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS  
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Mark E. Ziegler

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES  
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 014078

### Abstract

The questions of how parents' childrearing time becomes associated with different developmental outcomes, and of the relative importance of the quantity and quality of shared parent-child time, remain largely unanswered. This study explored such associations in a sample of 48 white, middle-class third and fourth graders and their parents. The amount of time fathers spent supervising their children was positively related to teacher ratings of the children's cognitive abilities, but the inverse was true for mothers. These and other results suggest the relation between parents' time and children's development is not straightforward, and very different for the mothers and fathers in this sample.

## The Time Parents and Children Spend Together

This study explored relations between the time parents and children spend together and individual developmental differences among the children. Despite the plausibility of such connections, it has only been recently that attention has been focused on substantiating or detailing how such a relation works.

### Method

A total of 48 families were recruited through their children's elementary school in a Detroit suburb. The children, split equally with 24 boys and 24 girls, were third and fourth graders from middle-class, white, two-parent families.

Each child received a battery of 5 cognitive and achievement tasks. Teachers were asked to rate the children on ten classroom behaviors including, for example, learning effectiveness, memory, attentiveness, and cooperativeness.

Both parents were interviewed and asked to keep diaries of the time they spent with their child for the Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday following the interview. Parents were asked not to consult one another, and to complete their diaries independently. They were instructed to make diary entries from the time their child got up in the morning until the child went to bed. They accounted for their time in 15-minute intervals describing only one activity per interval.

Both mother and father were asked to record their child's activities, and to note with whom the child spent his or her time. Each parent also

recorded the level of contact with his or her child for each 15-minute interval. There were three possible contact levels: (1) A parent indicated direct time with his or her child when they were engaged in the same activity together and no one else was present. (2) Indirect time included time spent together, but parent and child were either engaged in different activities and/or another person was present. Interaction occurred, but it may have been only intermittent. (3) Available time included supervisory situations in which the parent was easily available without offering much attention to the child. For Direct, Indirect, and Available times, two estimates were calculated: (1) a 5-day work week estimate was calculated by multiplying the average of the Tuesday and Thursday times by 5; (2) a 2-day weekend estimate was obtained by doubling the Saturday measures. These estimates were calculated for all mothers and fathers who returned diaries.

### Results

There were no child-related sex differences in any of the weekday, weekend, or total week times mothers and fathers spent with their children.

Both mothers' and fathers' times were highly variable, but on the average, mothers spent significantly more time with their children than fathers in each weekday category. This trend was not nearly as one-sided on weekends, and for Direct time, the fathers' average exceeded the mothers'. For total week estimates, fathers spent significantly less Available and Indirect time than mothers, but Direct times were more similar.

For both parents, Direct and Indirect times were consistently greater for children with one or no siblings. Available time was always greater when

there were two or more siblings.

A series of stepwise regression analyses were completed to determine the relative importance of parent time and education as predictors of the child's task performance and teacher ratings. Parent times were not associated with the children's task performances. Three variables were found to be important in the prediction of the Cognitive Abilities teacher rating scales: father Available time, father education, and mother Available time. Increases in the fathers' Available time and fathers' education were associated with increases in this set of teacher ratings; increases in mothers' Available times were related to decreases in these ratings. This is an especially important finding since the Cognitive Abilities scales were the ratings most strongly and consistently related to children's concurrent and subsequent school performance.

Thus, the most significant results are these:

- (1) There was large interfamily variability in the times mothers and fathers spent with their child.
- (2) There were no child-related sex differences in the time parents and children spent together.
- (3) Mothers' Available time with their school-age children exceeded fathers', but fathers' Indirect and Direct times more closely approximated those of the mother.
- (4) Increased paternal Available time was associated with increased teacher ratings of the child's cognitive abilities; the opposite was true for mothers.

#### Discussion

There were three puzzling findings:

1. Parent-child times were never associated with the children's task performances, but both father and mother Available times were strongly

associated with the teacher ratings. The time parents spend with their children should influence both cognitive and social development. If this is true, parent time would produce a relatively smaller impact on either cognitive or social development than on both taken together. Teacher ratings assess both areas of development, but testing taps the child's cognitive abilities alone. Thus, relations may exist between parent time and teacher ratings but not between parent time and the children's task performances. The converse may also be true: the amount of Available time parents devote to their children may depend more closely on the teacher rated attributes than on the tested skills.

2. When a relation existed between mother Available time and a teacher rating, it was negative. Increased mother Available time may have been a reaction to the child behavior rated by the teachers. That is, children who received generally lower teacher ratings may have been perceived by their mothers as requiring more supervision.

3. When relationships existed between parent time and the teacher ratings, it was almost always Available time that was involved. Why are the two measures of parent-child interaction, Indirect, and Direct times, not strongly related to the child measures? Theorists have suggested that the time parents spend in interaction with their children enhances the children's cognitive development. This hypothesis was not supported, but the time measures used in this research have two shortcomings. First, the time measures used here fail to capture the changing history of the parent-child relationship. That is, the time parents now spend with their third

and fourth graders may not reflect the time they have spent over the past nine or ten years. Second, the quantity of time parents spend interacting with their child may have no relation to the quality of the interaction.